

VZCZCXYZ0009  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHKB #0167 0561518  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 251518Z FEB 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4821  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 2662  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 0831

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000167

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/25/2018

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL KDEM AJ

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION JOURNALIST PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED IN COURSE OF INVESTIGATION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ANNE E. DERSE PER 1.4(B,D).

¶1. (C) On February 22, two unknown assailants physically assaulted opposition Azadliq newspaper correspondent Agil Khalil. According to Khalil on February 25, on February 22 he was the newspaper's investigative journalist on duty; at approximately 1700, he received reports that trees were being chopped down and burned in Baku's "Olive Gardens." Khalil arrived at the gardens to investigate the reports, and was approached by two unidentified men who demanded to know who he was and on what authority he was taking photographs. Khalil said he worked for Azadliq newspaper and presented his press identification, which the men confiscated. He was the only journalist on the scene. Khalil said that one of the men struck him on the neck, and then tried to choke him with his camera strap. At some point, Khalil ended up on the ground, and the two men repeatedly kicked him. According to Khalil, the 20-30 laborers who had been chopping down and burning trees witnessed the assault, but none intervened; a passerby tried to mitigate but the assailants did not take him seriously. Khalil said that three adolescents were in the vicinity and photographed the incident. He promised to pass the photos to the Embassy.

¶2. (C) Khalil said he was taken to a public hospital, where physicians examined his external injuries but performed no checks for internal damage. In the meeting, Khalil's right hand was bandaged and he had a fractured finger on a splint. He had a bandage over his right eye, where he said he had been kicked, and there were traces of bruising under his right eye and on his throat. Khalil reported that he sustained bruising to his chest and over his liver, and he complained of pain in his liver. In addition to his press identification, the assailants reportedly took his wallet and his scarf; Khalil said none of the items was returned. Khalil said that he filed a criminal complaint in Baku's Binegadi district, and that two police stations (numbers four and seven) and the Binegadi district Prosecutor's Office were investigating the case. According to Khalil, prominent media rights attorney Elchin Sadikhov has agreed to take his case.

¶3. (C) Khalil said that he believes he has been followed since the incident. He also has received more than 30 telephone calls from unknown numbers; in each instance, the caller did not speak. Khalil suspects that the property in question was illegally acquired. He plans to further investigate the case and publish an article with his conclusions.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador called the Acting Minister of the Interior and urged a full investigation of the case based on the complaint filed by Khalil. The Acting Minister said the Ministry had received the information on the case, an investigation is under way and the Ministry will follow up

once the perpetrators are found. The head of the local OSCE office also advised that the OSCE was looking into the case and would coordinate closely with the Embassy to follow up.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: Khalil's case is the latest in a continuing trend of attacks and threats against journalists. We will press the GOAJ to vigorously investigate Khalil's case and all instances of physical violence against journalists and prosecute those responsible to the full extent of the law.  
DERSE